



Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary

23 February 2009

NON-GOVERNMENT (Voting)

Jim Coon
Business and Commerce

David Hoffman
Citizen-At-Large

Dale Hazlehurst
Commercial Shipping

Louis M. Herman, Ph.D.
Conservation

Liz Kumabe
Education

Robert Bruck
Fishing

Luana Howell
Hawai'i County

William A. Friedl
Honolulu County

James Yamamoto
Kaua'i County

Cheryl Sterling
Maui County

Pohai Kirkland
Native Hawaiian

Teri Leicher
Ocean Recreation

Adam Pack, Ph.D.
Research

Michael Stanton
Tourism

Reginald A. White
Whale Watching

GOVERNMENT

Marnie Meyer
DBEDT - OP

Elizabeth Corbin
DBEDT Ocean Resources

Athline M. Clark
DLNR - DAR

Vacant
DOH

Dean Watase
DOT - Harbors

Gene Brighthouse
Fagatele Bay NMS

Jerry B. Norris
OHA - Voting

Jeff Pollack
NMFS - Law Enforcement

Lisa Van Aita
NMFS - PIRO

'Aulani Wilhelm
Papahānaumokuākea MNM

Eric Kingma
WESPAC - Voting

Cindy Barger
US ACOE

Eric Roberts
US Coast Guard

Rebecca Hommon
US Navy

Ms. Naomi McIntosh
Sanctuary Superintendent,
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary
6600 Kalaniana'ole Highway, Suite 301
Honolulu, Hawaii 96825

RE: The recent downlisting by the International Union for the Conservation of Species (IUCN) of the humpback whale from "Vulnerable" to "Least Concern."

Dear Ms. McIntosh:

The Sanctuary Advisory Council of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary ("the Sanctuary") has noted the recent downlisting by the International Union for the Conservation of Species (IUCN) of the humpback whale from "Vulnerable" to "Least Concern."

Although the mission of the Sanctuary is to protect the North Pacific humpback whale and its habitat in Hawaii, it is well documented that these whales are migratory and during summer months distribute themselves widely along high-latitude regions with strong preferences for areas around southeast Alaska. There is also some interchange of North Pacific humpback whales between the three principal winter grounds: the central Pacific (Hawaii), the eastern Pacific (western Mexico and outlying islands), and the western Pacific (the Ogasawara [Bonin] Islands and the Ryukyu Islands, principally), as documented in a recent North-Pacific-wide international research project (SPLASH) (Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance and Status of Humpback Whales in the North Pacific) ¹.

The western Pacific region has not seen the degree of recovery of the humpback whale that has been occurring in the central and eastern Pacific regions. There is documentation that some whales wintering in the western Pacific may summer in the upper central or eastern Pacific feeding areas. Any resumption of commercial whaling for humpbacks in the North Pacific has the potential to further decimate stocks that are in poor recovery and to remove individuals with high reproductive potential from other stocks that may occasionally visit these areas of poorly-recovering stocks and contribute significantly to their eventual recovery.

Because of the interchange of whales among stocks, taking of whales through whaling cannot discriminate among these stocks reliably no matter where they are taken. Consequently, the recovery of depleted stocks may be threatened. The Sanctuary Advisory Council therefore urges that any proposal to resume whaling of North Pacific humpbacks be defeated during the voting process. In our opinion the benefits of nonlethal whale research to whale conservation and to the understanding of whale behavior and whale societies, together with benign whale watching activities, have enormous scientific, educational, political, social, and economic advantages that far outweigh any economic or scientific gains attributable to whaling operations.



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It is proposed, therefore, that the above mentioned recommendation be forwarded to Daniel J. Basta, Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, to be sent to Rebecca Lent, NOAA Fisheries International.

Additionally, we think it may be appropriate to share this information with Dr. William Hogarth, the current U.S. Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission IWC, and Dean of the College of Marine Sciences, University of South Florida. The recommendation would put on record the objection of the Sanctuary to any resumption of whaling for North Pacific humpbacks, and serve as a reference for the U.S. Delegation should any nation propose such resumption.

Sincerely,

William A. Friedl
Advisory Council Chair
Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale
National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

cc: Jeffrey Walters, Ph.D., Co-Manager, HI Humpback Whale NMS (Hawaii DLNR, DAR)

1: Calambokidis, J., Falcone, E. A., Quinn, T. J., Burdin, A. M., Clapham, P. J., Ford, J. K. B., Gabriele, C. M., LeDuc, R., Mattila, D., Rojas-Bracho, L., Straley, J. M., Taylor, B. L., Urban, J. R., Weller, D., Witteveen, B. H., Yamaguchi, M., Bendlin, A., Camacho, D., Flynn, K., Havron, A., Huggins, J., & Maloney, N. (2008). SPLASH: Structure of Populations, Levels of Abundance and Status of Humpback Whales in the North Pacific. Final Report for Contract AB133F-03-RP-00078 to U.S. Department of Commerce.